

Parenting *ideas*

INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Michael Grose

10 research-backed tips for raising happy kids

I have just returned from a research trip to the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence near New York. The Yale Center is home of the **RULER Program**, the world's best emotional intelligence program for children and families. I visited the Center in preparation for the introduction of the **RULER Program** tools to all Parentingideas Club members. We'll be doing that soon – and I can't wait!

The thing that I love about the **RULER Program** is that it's totally evidence-based. Its effectiveness is backed by mountains of scientific evidence, so credibility is assured. But that's all I can tell you about the program now – you'll just have to wait.

In the meantime, there are plenty of other evidence-based tips for parenting that I can share with you. Here are 10 research-backed tips for raising what most parents want: happy, successful kids.

1 Birth order matters

Birth order is something parents need to work with. If you disregard the birth order of your children you are overlooking a vital piece of your parenting puzzle. For instance, research has shown that eldest children tend to experience greater mental health problems, particularly anxiety, than children in any other birth position. Happiness can be elusive for this group so they require a parenting style that is cognisant of their drivers, and that releases pressure rather than placing extra pressure on them.

2 Positive peers matter

Your child's friends impact heavily on their wellbeing and frame of mind. When peer relationships are smooth, children seem to be happier, more content and even learn better. Recent research I was involved in demonstrated that the wellbeing of teenage girls is highly influenced by their peer groups. A positive peer group usually equated with high life satisfaction regardless of what other factors were at play.

3 Parent mental health matters

If you want happy kids then you need to get yourself happy. Parent anxiety and depression is linked to behavioural problems in kids; it also makes our parenting less effective.

4 Sibling relationships matter

Research shows that over the long haul healthy relationships makes kids happier. But how do you go about teaching kids to get on? Start by encouraging children to build small acts of kindness, which builds

empathy. Help them mend relationships that have broken down. Start this with siblings first. With only-children, make sure you build these skills through plenty of interactions with peers.

5 Developmental matching matters

A number of studies have shown that much of what is considered 'poor parenting' has more to do with poor developmental matching. Put simply, parents who raise an eleven-year-old like they did their eight-year-old may find that conflict and resistance become their constant companions, and unhappiness accompanies their child.

6 Good parenting matters

Permissive, laissez faire, autocratic or authoritative parenting? These are parenting styles most parents use at some point.

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Building parent-school partnerships

... The right time to start a relationship ...

If you want your child to be happy and succeed over the long term, then extensive British research shows the way. The links between authoritative parenting (a mixture of firmness, warmth and family participation) and children's happiness and wellbeing are well drawn.

7 Family dinners matter

Yes, you've got to eat. But you need to eat together. Significant research links family strength and children's wellbeing with regular family mealtimes. Importantly, there is a high correlation between teenagers who eat with their family at least five times a week and good mental health.

8 Fun matters

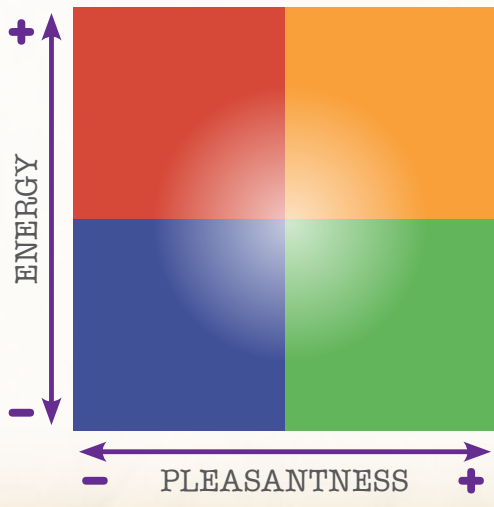
Many kids get too little unstructured time these days. Play that is not initiated by adults is more than just mucking around: kids learn and grow through such play. Researchers believe that the dramatic drop in unstructured play time is in part responsible for slowing kids' cognitive and emotional development. Unstructured play helps children learn how to work in groups, to share, negotiate, resolve conflicts, regulate their emotions and behaviour, and speak up for themselves.

9 Helping others matters

The Positive Psychology movement know what they are talking about when they put volunteering at the forefront of an individual's wellbeing. Helping others makes you happy over the long term. The same applies with kids. Just don't let their grumpiness put you off when you expect them to help.

10 Emotional intelligence matters

Emotional intelligence is a skill, not an inborn trait. Believing that your kids will just naturally come to understand their emotions (let alone those of others) doesn't set them up for success or happiness. Kids learn best when they have concrete tools to assist their learning, whether learning to read (books come in handy), playing sport (a ball and some goalposts helps) or learning to dance (some suitable music helps). The wonderful tools in the RULER Program toolkit make learning emotional intelligence accessible for kids.



So let's recap - to raise happy, successful kids:

- 1 Birth order matters
- 2 Positive peers matter
- 3 Parent mental health matters
- 4 Sibling relationships matter
- 5 Developmental matching matters
- 6 Good parenting matters
- 7 Family dinners matter
- 8 Fun matters
- 9 Helping others matters
- 10 Emotional intelligence matters

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